

MATHEW LEFKOWITZ, MD

PAIN MANAGEMENT
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PULSED RADIOFREQUENCY (PULSED RF) PROCEDURE

Pulsed Radiofrequency Description:

Patients with sciatica, spinal stenosis, herniated (“slipped”) discs, post-surgical pain, or similar conditions, who fail to respond to epidural steroid injections are good candidates for a pulsed radiofrequency (pulsed RF) procedure. Unlike the related radiofrequency ablation (RF) procedure, pulsed RF does not damage the cells involved and instead achieves a therapeutic effect by means of a high-frequency electric field that is administered in pulses to the targeted nerve tissue. This results in a long-lasting interruption in pain signals and reduced pain in the targeted area.

The procedure is relatively pain-free and is performed in our office under local anesthesia. It takes approximately 15 minutes and is considered a very safe and sterile procedure with little risk of complications. Following a pulsed RF procedure, patients can resume normal activities. A significant reduction in pain is usually observed within several days and lasts for at least several weeks.

Pulsed radiofrequency techniques have been used for decades for medical purposes, however, peer reviewed studies that address pulsed RF are only now starting to appear in the medical literature. Pulsed RF is thus considered a relatively new technique by insurance companies in the United States, and as a result most companies do not cover the procedure. However, in Europe, pulsed RF procedures are frequently performed and have high rates of success. Dr. Lefkowitz trained in Europe under one of the most well-known radiofrequency doctors in the world and has become an expert in radiofrequency procedures over the past 15 years.

How the procedure is performed:

The pulsed radiofrequency procedure is performed in a similar manner to previous pain management injections you have undergone in the procedure room. This procedure is performed as an outpatient, in-office procedure and takes approximately 15 minutes.

Dr. Lefkowitz will use the fluoroscopy (X-ray) unit to locate the problematic area (lower back or neck) and direct the radiofrequency needle to the specific origin of pain. The doctor may stimulate the needle to ensure accurate placement. This may cause you to feel a buzzing / tingling / heaviness sensation. Patient involvement at this stage is essential to the procedure’s success. Once the needles are placed, electrical stimulation delivered in pulses through the needle disrupts the surrounding tissue, stunning the nerves and blocking them from sending pain signals. The temperature of the tissue is carefully monitored to ensure that no cell damage occurs.

After the procedure, the patient will rest in the recovery area until he/she is ready to go home. Once at home, rest for approximately one – two hours. The following day the patient can resume normal activities, including work; however, restrictions in place prior to the procedure may still apply.

What to expect following radiofrequency:

If the procedure is successful, the pain relief can last up to several months.

With any procedure there are risks, side effects, and the possibility of complications. As with any soft tissue wound, you may experience discomfort such as muscular spasm, soreness, numbness, or burning, all of which should subside over the next several weeks.

Patients currently taking blood-thinning (anticoagulation) medications should inform Dr. Lefkowitz’s staff. There is no complication in taking this medication with performing pulsed radiofrequency; however, the staff should be aware.

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Additional information:

Please discuss any specific concerns with Dr. Lefkowitz.

For more information, please visit www.lowbackpain.com or www.spine-health.com.